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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8978
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001980

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: GOR REACTS TO SECRETARY'S VISIT TO TBILISI

Classified By: Acting Pol M/C Bob Patterson. Reasons 1.4
(b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary. While affirming that the GOR welcomed U.S. high-level visits to Tbilisi as a stimulus to facilitate the negotiation process, MFA officials expressed unease over the message delivered by Secretary Rice during her visit to Tbilisi. They were particularly "alarmed" by her support for the internationalization of the peacekeeping force and the emphasis on a NATO MAP offer to Georgia. At the same time as the Secretary's meeting with Saakashvili, Abkhazian "president" Bagapsh met with FM Lavrov in Moscow. MFA officials denied that Bagapsh had come to discuss the opening of a Russian diplomatic mission in Abkhazia, describing it instead as an "institute" for dealing with legal, economic, and humanitarian issues. The GOR criticized the GOG for "staging" provocations in the zones of conflict and justified the July 9 overflight of a Russian aircraft as an effort to "clarify" the situation and avoid "bloodshed" in South Ossetia. For the time being, the GOR was urging the signing of an agreement stipulating the non-use of force, the normalization of Kodori, and direct dialogue between the parties, the MFA officials said. End summary.

Reacting to Secretary in Tbilisi

¶2. (C) MFA CIS Deputy Directors Aleksey Pavlovskiy and Dmitriy Tarabrin told us July 10 that they believed Secretary Rice's visit to Tbilisi had not sent a sufficiently "constructive" message to the parties to the conflicts. They expressed "alarm" that the Secretary had endorsed the internationalization of the peacekeeping force in an effort, they said, to minimize the Russian peacekeepers' role. The proposal, they insisted, was something that the Abkhaz would never accept. Pavlovskiy and Tarabrin claimed that U.S. policy makers failed to understand that NATO membership meant the end of Georgian territorial integrity. Pavlovskiy asked rhetorically what the U.S. position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be if Georgia joined NATO. Earlier in the day, FM Lavrov had said: "Regrettably, we heard Secretary Rice saying that granting MAP to Georgia would resolve the problems with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On the contrary, MAP would end any hope of resolving the conflict."

In the meantime, Bagapsh is Back in Moscow

¶3. (C) Tarabin denied that Bagapsh's July 10 visit to Moscow was for further discussions on the opening of a Russian diplomatic mission in Abkhazia. According to him, Moscow was planning to open an "institute" that would concern itself with legal, economic, and humanitarian issues, and would perform no consular functions. Tarabin was reluctant to provide the exact date, but expected that the institute could open by the end of 2008 or the beginning of 2009.

Karasin in Tbilisi

14. (C) Pavlovskiy informed us that the July 4 mortar shelling had so angered DFM Karasin, then visiting Tbilisi with a message from Medvedev, that he wanted to cut the visit short and return to Moscow immediately. He stayed, but the subsequent talks were overshadowed by the incident and the feeling that the Georgians were "staging" provocations while pretending to engage in a dialogue with the Russians. Pavlovskiy maintained that "by now the GOR understood well the tactics" employed by the GOG. The July 3 "assassination attempt" on Sanakoyev was not convincing. Sanakoyev had "naturally" not been injured. MFA officials also had heard that twenty minutes before the July mortar attack, the Georgian military had left its posts for a safe haven.

15. (C) Pavlovskiy confirmed that Karasin's visit to Tbilisi was part of preparations for the summit suggested by Medvedev during the his June meeting with Saakashvili. With "provocations" increasing, however, Pavlovskiy thought that planning for the summit could not go forward. Through Karasin, Medvedev had sent a reply to the Georgian non-paper peace proposal which DFM Vashadze had delivered in Moscow on June 23. In essence, the GOR position was that all good elements in the proposal could be implemented only when the two parties to the conflict talk directly and establish a certain level of mutual trust.

Friends' Meeting

16. (C) Pavlovskiy affirmed that the Friends' proposal accorded with Russia's position. It was now time to move it forward, he thought. Pavlovskiy lamented that every improvement in the situation was foiled by Georgian "provocations." Tarabrin added that for now the GOR would push for the signing of an agreement stipulating the non-use of force, the normalization of Kodori, and direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict in all international fora.
BEYRLE